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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: TURKISH CYPRIOTS DIVIDED OVER GREEK CYPRIOT  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Classified by CDA Jane Zimmerman for reasons 1.4 (b) and  
1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Although closely watched by Turkish Cypriot (T/C) politicians, February 2008 presidential elections in the Republic of Cyprus do not engender in the north widespread hope for a future settlement. Of those we polled in the "ruling," pro-solution Republican Turkish Party (CTP), a majority believe that victory by either of the two opposition candidates, Dimitris Christofias or Ioannis Kasoulides, might jump-start currently stalled negotiations. The T/C "opposition" -- and even some high-ranking CTP insiders -- argue, however, that the Greek Cypriots (G/Cs) seek dominance, not an equitable Cyprus partnership, and that ultimately it makes little difference who comes to power in the south. All agree that the international community, especially the United States, must bring pressure to bear if the new RoC president-elect is to negotiate in earnest. End Summary.

Anybody but Papadopoulos (For Pro-Solution T/Cs)

¶2. (C) A majority of those "ruling" CTP interlocutors we have engaged support either of the two opposition candidates, Dimitris Christofias or Ioannis Kasoulides, in the RoC presidential elections, with a clear preference for Kasoulides. "TRNC Prime Minister" Ferdi Sabit Soyer told us in late December that he preferred Kasoulides because he opposed Christofias's "far left rhetoric." He quipped that, "We are part of the West. The dialogue should be along liberal and EU lines." Talat Private Secretary Asim Akansoy dubbed Christofias an "inflexible ideologue" and said that T/Cs wanted Kasoulides to win. Papadopoulos, according to Akansoy, is "primitive and thinks in terms of the 19th century, blood and all." He added that "good negotiations, based on the Annan Plan, in deed, if not in name," could resume if either of the two challengers won election.

¶3. (C) Not all CTP officials were as hopeful as Soyer or Akansoy regarding an election victory by Kasoulides or Christofias. Newly-appointed Cyprus Problem negotiator and CTP "deputy" Ozdil Nami believes things will be easier with either challenger in office, but noted that every leader was constrained by his people. "Presidential Spokesman" Hasan Ercakica said it made no difference who won the elections. Leftist Christofias had gone "too far to the right" on the Cyprus Question during the campaign, meaning he had adopted hard-line, G/C-nationalist positions, and would be unable politically to return to a more pro-solution slant. Ercakica added that, until the G/Cs gave up the goal of dominating "the Turks" on the island, the Cyprus Problem would remain unresolved.

Alleged G/Cs "Racism" Toward T/Cs Predominates

14. (C) The opposition in the North, even those who are pro-solution, expect no movement in negotiations after the G/C presidential elections, even if Papadopoulos is defeated.

UBP "deputy" and former party leader Huseyin Ozgurgun, who unlike most party mates voted YES in the 2004 Annan Plan referendum, joked that "it could be Huseyin in power, could be Arda, but nothing will change. The Greek Cypriots are content with the present situation." Serdar Denktash, head of the Democrat Party (DP), followed the same line, claiming G/C policy will not waver even after a change in administration. Denktash recently told us he preferred Papadopoulos, who is "genuine," over the "deceitful" Christofias. Former T/C Cyprus Problem negotiator Rasit Pertev, who resigned in December and who now heads the "People's Party" (Halk Partisi), trusts Kasoulides more than the others. Nevertheless, he believed that there was little difference among the main candidates on the Cyprus Problem due to G/C "racism" against Turkish Cypriots.

"Not Enough to Say We Want a Solution"

15. (C) Even the most optimistic Turkish Cypriots told us that the international community, especially the United States, must bring pressure to bear on whomever gets elected in the RoC, if real progress is to be made on the Cyprus Problem. Akansoy said that the best way to "influence" the G/Cs was not to punish them, but to give something to the T/C community, such as greater investment or direct flights.

"Prime Minister" Soyer mentioned the EU Direct Trade Regulation, which he hoped would be passed soon. New Cyprus Problem negotiator Nami quipped that "it is not enough to say we want a solution (to get the G/Cs to negotiate in earnest).

You (the international community) have to do something." Ozgurgun said that, if the Turkish Cypriots are "integrated" more into the world, the G/Cs "will come to the table." The G/Cs did not want to "share the pie," he continued, since

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they already enjoyed international legitimacy/recognition and thus had no incentives to do so.

Comment:

16. (C) Depressed by the stall in negotiations and by perceived slights from the international community, for a majority of Turkish Cypriots, solving the Cyprus Problem has become less an existential issue. This explains why the neck-and-neck presidential campaign in the south, which dominates the news there and divides the population into partisan camps, mostly spawns yawns and resignation amidst the rank-and-file north of the Green Line. Christofias, whose AKEL party ideologically resembles CTP and who regularly boasts of friendly relations with Turkish Cypriots, would seem to be the T/Cs' preferred candidate. Many, however, have not forgotten the AKEL commissar's last-minute Annan Plan flip-flop, which contributed greatly to the initiative's failure in the G/C community. Similarly, other Turkish Cypriots who might have supported YES voter and Euro-modern Kasoulides are troubled by his recent -- and we think, electorally-motivated -- adoption of harder-line CyProb policies. Yet their discomfort with the challengers pales in comparison to their contempt for Papadopoulos, who, to most T/Cs, embodies the worst excesses of Cyprus's ethnically-dominant Greek Cypriot community. We surmise that most Turkish Cypriots would delight in the incumbent's defeat come February, and hold hope that a Christofias or Kasoulides victory might bode well for future negotiations.

ZIMMERMAN